

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0554

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 1558

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AS

SUBJ: WHITLAM' S VIEW OF REGIONAL ASSOCIATION

REF: SAIGON 3924

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: FROM RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH DEPT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIALS, IT APPEARS THAT WHITLAM' S CONCEPT OF A REGIONAL ORGANIZATION IS STILL FAR FROM FIRM. HE DOES, HOWEVER, APPARENTLY WISH TO INITIATE A FORUM AS A DISCUSSION GROUP AMONG COUNTRIES OF THE ASIAN REGION, INCLUDING MAINLAND CHINA. ACCORDING TO DFA SOURCES, REHABILITATION OF VIETNAM IS NOT INCLUDED AS A SUBJECT FOR FORUM CONSIDERATION AND THE PLACE OF JAPAN IN THE FORUM IS UNCLEAR. IT APPEARS, HOWEVER, THAT THE FORUM AS ENVISAGED BY WHITLAM WOULD EXCLUDE THE SOVIET UNION, TAIWAN AND PROBABLY THE U. S. FROM IST MEMBERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

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2. IN RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH COUNTRY DESK OFFICERS

IN DEPT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR MALAYSIA, INDONESIA AND THE PHILIPPINES, WE HAVE GAINED AN APPRECIATION OF WHITLAM' S PROPOSED REGIONAL FORUM. MUCH OF WHAT IS SUGGESTED IS WHAT SUCH A FORUM IS NOT INTENDED TO BE RATHER THAN WHAT HIS IDEA REALLY EMBRACES.

3. WHITLAM LAUNCHED HIS IDEA FOR A REGIONAL ORGANIZATION IN HIS SPEECH TO THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN CANBERRA ON JAN 27. IN THIS SPEECH HE REFERS TO THE IMPORTANCE AUSTRALIA ATTACHES TO ITS RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA AND PAYS DUE CREDIT TO ASEAN AS A SUB- REGIONAL ORGANIZATION WHICH IT IS NOT AUSTRALIA' S INTENTION TO DISTURB IN ANY WAY. WHITLAM REFERS TO HIS IDEA AS BEING REGIONAL IN CHARACTER AND QTE COOPERATIVE END QTE IN PERSUING THOSE MATTERS WHICH ARE OF INTEREST TO REGIONAL COUNTRIES. HIS OFT- QUOTED STATEMENT FROM THE POLITICAL SCIENCE SEMINAR SPEECH IS THAT THE REGIONAL FORUM IS CONCEIVED AS AN INITIATIVE TO HELP FREE THE REGION FROM QTE GREAT POWER RIVALRIES THAT HAVE BEDEVILLED ITS PROGRESS FOR DECADES END QTE

HE FURTHER STATES THE REGIONAL FORUM WOULD BE DESIGNED TO QTE INSULATE THE REGION AGAINST IDEOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE FROM THE GREAT POWERS END QTE.

4. IN CONVERSATIONS MARCH 15 WITH R. K. GATE, MALAYSIAN DESK OFFICER AND RON WALKER, INDONESIAN AND PHILIPPINE DESK OFFICER, THE FOLLOWING AMALGAM OF THOUGHTS ABOUT WHITLAM' S FORUM EMERGED. THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE FORUM INCLUDES ANY CONSIDERATION OF THE RE- HABILITATION OF VIETNAM AS PART OF ITS ACTIVITIES. IT WAS NOT CONCEIVED AN ENLARGEMENT OF ASEAN OR AS ANYTHING MORE THAN A PERIODIC MEETING OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM REGIONAL COUNTRIES. ACCORDING TO GATE, THE GEOGRAPHIC EXTENT OF PARTICIPATION WOULD INCLUDE ALL THE COUNTRIES FROM BURMA TO KOREA AND WAS MEANT TO INCLUDE NORTH VIETNAM, NORTH KOREA AND MAINLAND CHINA. ALTHOUGHT GATE DID NOT SAY SO, CURRENT AUSTRALIAN POLICY TOWARD CHINA WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT TAIWAN WAS NOT INTENDED TO BE AMONG THE MEMBERS. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SOVIET UNION WOULD NOT BE INCLUDED ON THE BASIS THAT IT WAS NOT QTE POLITICALLY END QTE A FAR EASTERN COUNTRY, ALTHOUGH GEOGRAPHICALLY A GOOD PART OF THE SOVIET UNION IS IN THE FAR EAST. WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE PRESENCE OF AMERICAN FORCES IN THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES PRESENTED A PROBLEM, GATE RESPONDED THEY DID NOT IN THE SHORT RUN. EMBOFF ALSO REFERRED TO WHITLAM' S BROACHING OF THE SUBJECT DURING HIS RECENT

VISIT TO INDONESIA AND THE APPARENT LUKE- WARM RECEPTION GIVEN TO THE IDEA BY PRESIDENT SUHARTO AND PRIME MINISTER MALIK. BOTH WALKER AND GATE INDICATED THEIR BELIEF THAT THE SUPPOSED REBUFF IN INDONESIA WAS PLAYED UP BY THE AUSTRALIAN PRESS OUT OF ALL PROPORTION TO THE ACTUAL POSITION OF THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT. EMBOFF THEN REFERRED TO A RECENT NEWSPAPER ARTICLE WHICH INDICATED THAT SELECTED AUSTRALIAN EMBASSIES IN THE AREA HAD BEEN ASKED TO PUCH THE IDEA OF A REGIONAL FORUM IN ORDER TO OBTAIN A SURVEY OF ATTITUDES AMONG THE GOVERNMENTS CONCERNED. GATE RESPONDED THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO SUCH ATTEMPT BUT THAT AUSTRALIAN POSTS HAD RECEIVED THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AS A ROUTINE MATTER AND HAD BEEN ASKED TO DISTRIBUTE COPIES OF THE SPEECH TO HOST COUNTRY OFFICIALS IN THE NORMAL COURSE OF BUSINESS. AT THE END OF THE CONVERSATION, GATE REACHED INTO HIS IN- BOX AND PULLED OUT A MESSAGE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY IN TOKYO WHICH HE SAID CONTAINED CONFIRMATION THAT THE JAPANESE ARE NOT PREPARED TO TAKE ANY INITIATIVE IN THE MATTER OF PROMOTING AN ASIAN FORUM OF ANY KIND. AS A FINAL THOUGHT, WALKER STATED THAT PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM WAS WELL AWARE OF INDONESIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD MAINLAND CHINA AND IN THE BRIEF PREPARED FOR WHITLAM'S VISIT THERE, HAD BEEN CAUTIONED ABOUT TRYING TO MOVE TOO FAST WITH THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT ON ANY FORUM WHICH WOULD INCLUDE MAINLAND CHINA AS A MEMBER.

5. COMMENT: ACCORDING TO THE TWO DFA OFFICIALS, GOA'S TIMEFRAME FOR DISCUSSING FORMATION OF A FORUM IN ASIA WAS SET AT ABOUT TWO YEARS. SINCE HIS VISIT TO INDONESIA AND HIS REMARKS ABOUT U. S. FORCES IN THAILAND REPORTED IN NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE, WHITLAM HIMSELF HAS NOT REFERRED PUBLICLY TO HIS IDEA. JUDGING
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FROM THE DESCRIPTION OF WHAT WHITLAM HAS IN MIND, THE ASIAN FORUM WOULD BE PRIMARILY A LOOSELY KNIT DISCUSSION GROUP WHICH COULD LEAD TO COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS OF INTEREST TO THE REGION. THE INCLUSION OF CHINA AND THE EXCLUSION OF SOVIET UNION AND PROBABLY THE U. S. WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT WHITLAM IS INTERESTED IN ACHIEVING AT THE MINIMUM AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AMONG CHINA AND ITS NEIGHBORS. JAPAN'S PLACE IN SUCH A FORUM IS NOT CLEAR FROM THE FOREGOING NOR ARE THE SUBJECTS WHICH WOULD BE DISCUSSED. IT SEEMS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT AUSTRALIA WISHES TO TAKE A LEADING PART IN FORMATION OF SUCH A FORUM AND THAT WHITLAM'S IDEAS, ALTHOUGH CERTAINLY FAR FROM FIRM, PIONT IN THE DIRECTION OF RESTRICTING MEMBERSHIP TO THOSE COUNTRIES WHO BOTH POLITICALLY AND GEOGRAPHICALLY HAVE A VITAL

INTEREST IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE REGION. AS DCM WAS
RECENTLY INFORMED BY DEPUTY SECRETARY SHANN OF DFA,
AUSTRALIA IS BEGINNING TO FEEL ITSELF ALONE IN THE
WORLD AND WISHES TO SHOW SOME INITIATIVE IN FORMING
NEW FRIENDSHIPS BASED ON MUTUAL INTERESTS WITH OTHER
COUNTRIES IN THE REGION.
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